

SEACOASTONLINE | Archives | Business | Cars | Classifieds | Dining | Jobs | Real Estate | Sports



Click Here  
to Receive  
Our Daily  
Headlines

**Seacoastonline**  
The Source for the Seacoast



Portsmouth, NH Saturday, June 29, 2002



**PORTSMOUTH HERALD**



Jen Drociak of the New Hampshire Coastal Program put her hands to work planting salt marsh cordgrass near Rye Harbor. Drociak is one of many volunteers participating in a 25-acre salt marsh restoration project.

Staff photo by Rich Beauchesne

## Save our salt marshes

By Jesse J. DeConto  
[jdeconto@seacoastonline.com](mailto:jdeconto@seacoastonline.com)

RYE - Aw, c'mon. Are you telling me humans ruined the Awcomin Marsh?

When the Army Corps of Engineers dredged Rye Harbor in 1941 and 1962, the sediment collected from the ocean bottom had to go somewhere. The government agency chose the nearby Awcomin Marsh, and local scientists say this human activity harmed coastal plant and animal life.

"The Army Corps just took all the material from the harbor and dumped it in the marsh," said Jeff Wilson, whose company Northeast Wetland Restoration is the contractor working to remove tens of thousands of cubic yards of "dredge spoil" and restore the Awcomin Marsh north of the harbor to its natural state.

Eric Hutchins, a biologist with the National Marine Fisheries Service habitat program, said the \$800,000 project is currently the largest salt water marsh

### Port. Herald

[Today's News](#)  
[Archives](#)  
[Business](#)  
[Cartoons](#)  
[Classifieds](#)  
[Columnists](#)  
[Crossword](#)  
[Editorials](#)  
[Employment](#)  
[Health](#)  
[Living](#)  
[Lottery](#)  
[Maine News](#)  
[Our Times](#)  
[Photographers](#)  
[Reporters](#)  
[Sports](#)  
[Spotlight](#)  
[Weather](#)  
[Xscape](#)

### Public Records

[Birth Notices](#)  
[Dist. Court](#)  
[Milestones](#)  
[Obituaries](#)  
[Police Logs](#)  
[Prop. Sold](#)

### Weeklies

[Dover](#)  
[Com. News](#)  
[Exeter](#)  
[News-Letter](#)  
[Hampton Union](#)  
[Rock. News](#)  
[York County](#)  
[Coast Star](#)  
[York Weekly](#)

### Entertainment

[Concerts](#)  
[Datemaker](#)  
[Dining](#)  
[Exhibits](#)  
[Features](#)

[Port](#)  
[Exe](#)  
[H](#)  
[Ro](#)  
[Dover](#)  
[York](#)



Local



Search



The  
fc



Si  
buy



o



o

[Menu Guide](#)  
[Movie Times](#)  
[Music](#)  
[Nightlife](#)  
[Recipes](#)  
[Theatre](#)  
[TV Times](#)

#### Tourism

[Attractions](#)  
[History](#)  
[Parks/Beaches](#)  
[Photo Gallery](#)  
[Summer Events](#)

#### Local Resources

[Churches](#)  
[Event Calendar](#)  
[Real Estate](#)  
[Local Links](#)  
[Mortgage](#)  
[Shop for a Car](#)  
[Towns](#)  
[Yellow Pages](#)

#### About Us

[Advertising](#)  
[Circulation](#)  
[Comm. Printing](#)  
[Contact Info](#)  
[Employment](#)  
[Logos/Link](#)  
[Media Kit](#)  
[Photo Reprints](#)  
[Place An Ad](#)  
[Site Index](#)  
[Site Search](#)  
[Subscribe](#)  
[Submit Forms](#)

program, said the \$600,000 project is currently the largest salt water marsh restoration project in New England. The New Hampshire Coastal Program of the Office of State Planning is the major sponsor.

Wilson said his bulldozer crews are taking anywhere from 2 to 6 feet of soil depth off the top off a 25-acre section of marsh. He explained that 14 acres were built up higher than the rest because of the second dredging in 1962.

"These guys will be here for a year moving dirt," Hutchins said.

The contractors are restoring the marsh to an elevation that will allow the high tides to saturate it with salt water.

A European strain of the common fresh water reed has replaced the cordgrass that would be growing if the marsh were low enough to receive salt water from the tides, according to David Burdick of the UNH Jackson Estuarine Laboratory.

The cordgrass, colored a more vibrant green, is already flourishing in areas where Wilson's crew has lowered the marshland to its natural level.

"If we didn't plant anything, the plants will take over," said Hutchins.

New England scientists and volunteers are trying to speed the revegetation process, experimenting with multiple planting techniques to see what works best.

Burdick said about 13 volunteers transplanted cordgrass plugs from other areas of the marsh and also planted bare-root seedlings from a Massachusetts nursery. In the fall, Burdick said, they'll try spreading cordgrass seed collected from the adult plants nearby.

"It's a great chance to learn," Hutchins said.

The Conservation Law Foundation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are partners in funding the cordgrass replanting project, which began on June 24 and will continue through the summer.

"As the soil level is being lowered so that the tide can come in, new plants will be planted," said Peter Shelley, a CLF vice president who oversees the agency's estuary restoration projects from his office in Rockland, Maine. "It got up too high so the salt water doesn't get to do its thing ... Trying to restore what Mother Nature does pretty effortlessly is very difficult and labor-intensive."

At the entrance to the work site, Dover resident Pat Caron has painted a landscape scene of the marsh teeming with wildlife. The sign reads, "Future Home Of ..." and depicts a red cardinal, a fox, an owl, a great blue heron, a deer, geese, ducks, a squirrel, a hawk, an osprey and other birds.

Anyone walking along the muddy access road across Route 1A from Rye Harbor and looking to the left won't see much but large piles of dirt and mud flats barren except for an occasional puddle.

But Rye Conservation Commission Chairman Jim Raynes said the excavation has created more than a mile of streams meandering through the marshes.

"There's a whole lot of wildlife habitat already," Raynes said. "A healthy salt marsh means that well into the future, there will be fish at George's Bank for the fishermen to catch."

Hutchins said Awcomin Marsh is home to small fish like minnows and juvenile cod, bluefish and flounder.

"We've actually created 25 acres of fish habitat," Hutchins said.

CC



Seac



Northeast Wetland Restoration will remove much of the soil from the marsh but will move some of it together to form islands with trees that coastal birds will inhabit, he said.

| [Back to the Portsmouth Herald](#) | [Email this Article](#) |



Seacoast Online is owned and operated by Seacoast Newspapers.  
Copyright © 2002 Seacoast Online. All rights reserved. [Please read our Copyright Notice and Terms of Use.](#) Seacoast Newspapers is a subsidiary of [Ottaway Newspapers, Inc.](#), a [Dow Jones](#) Company.